

THE DANGER OF ATTACKING SYRIA

Israeli Missile Test Could Have Launched World War III

by Nancy Spannaus

Sept. 9—Russia’s military went on high alert Sept. 3, following Israeli ballistic missile tests which sent two missiles eastward across the Mediterranean, in the same direction they would go if headed toward Russia. Speaking on Russian television, Deputy Defense Minister Anatoli Antonov issued a deadly serious warning: “The Mediterranean is a powder keg. A match is enough for fire to break out and possibly spread not only to neighboring states, but to other world regions as well. I remind you that the Mediterranean is close to the borders of the Russian Federation.”

The next day, Antonov summoned the U.S. and Israeli defense attachés, to lecture them on the danger of carrying out such action in the region, especially without advance notice to the Russian government.

The Defense Ministry release stated: “Anatoli Antonov emphasized that the discovery of a missile launch toward Russian territory is not a trivial event. It required attention from our country’s political leadership.” Defense Minister Sergei Shoygu had promptly briefed President Vladimir Putin, the commander-in-chief; the General Staff and Air-Space Defense Forces command points had been put on high alert, the release said.

Citing the 1988 Soviet-American agreement on notification of missile launches, Antonov reviewed for the attachés what could be considered a hair-trigger for retaliatory nuclear weapons launches. “The goal of that

agreement,” he said, “was to reduce the possibility of the wrong reaction to detection of a missile in flight, since the likelihood of evaluating a test launch as the beginning of a missile attack is fairly high.” He said that the Sept. 3 incident was similar to one in 1996, when the Norwegian weather probe Black Brant was detected in Russia as a possible missile attack. “The trajectory of the missiles detected in the Mediterranean were similar, in that it is practically impossible to determine after launch, what class of missile is moving on a ballistic trajectory.”

Antonov advised against missile tests in the Mediterranean, since there is a hefty U.S. presence in the region, armed with missile systems capable of striking Russian territory.

Incalculable

The missile-test incident underscores one of the points made by Lyndon LaRouche in his Aug. 29 assessment of the Syria situation. LaRouche stated that “claims that the Administration has understandings with Russia and Iran to prevent any such escalation [toward superpower conflict—ed.] must be dismissed as unreliable, particularly when weighed against the threat of military action leading to world war, and the likelihood of the use of thermonuclear weapons.”

While Russian spokesmen such as Foreign Minis-



Presidential Press and Information Office

Russian President Vladimir Putin's outspoken opposition to military action against Syria won the preponderance of support—including from the world's largest Muslim nation, Indonesia—at the G20 summit, as he pointed out in his final press conference.

ter Sergei Lavrov have made it clear that Russia does not intend to take military action in the Syrian conflict, the Russians have made it unequivocal that they will do whatever is necessary to defend the *principle* of national sovereignty, upon which international law is based. As emphasized in a speech by Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev in May 2012, “actions which undermine state sovereignty, can easily lead to full-scale regional wars, even—I am not trying to scare anyone here—with the use of nuclear weapons.”

President Putin, in an interview on the eve of last week's G20 meeting in St. Petersburg, addressed the issue again, in response to charges that Russia was defending the Assad government. “We do not defend this government. We are defending absolutely different things. We are defending the norms and principles of international law. We are defending the modern world order. We are defending the possibility ... of using force only within the existing international order, international rules, and international law. That is the absolute value. When issues related to the use of force are dealt with outside the framework of the UN and its Security Council, then there's a risk that such unlawful decisions might be applied against anybody, and on any pretext.”

As part of that defense, the Russian Navy is now deploying extra forces in the eastern Mediterranean, with as many as four ships already there, or announced to be on their way. While Kremlin chief of staff Sergei Ivanov said Sept. 5 that the primary reason for the deployment was to organize a possible evacuation of Russians from Syria, Antonov said the same day that the increased presence was “a legitimate, natural, and predictable reaction to the developing situation.”

At the beginning of the assault on Syria in 2011, Russia reportedly had 30,000 citizens living in the country—in addition to its naval base at the Mediterranean port of Tartus. At least 8,000 Russians remain, many of them longtime residents, with Syrian spouses and children.

Heavy Diplomatic Pressure

Russia's primary intervention in hopes of resolving the Syrian conflict has been diplomatic, starting, of course, with the proposal to convene a Geneva II conference which was agreed upon by Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov several months ago. That remains Russia's goal, despite constant U.S. sabotage.

While emphasizing repeatedly that any military action against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would be a violation of international law, Russian representatives have sought to organize others. Many meetings on the sidelines of the G20 focused on this point.

One of the points of stress has been the totally unproven charges that the Syrian government used chemical weapons against its own population in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta. Putin and Lavrov have both asserted that the so-called evidence is inconclusive, and, like many other nations, Russia has demanded that the U.S. wait until the UN Weapons Inspection team has finished its work, before deciding to act.

In his pre-G20 press conference, Putin went even further, asking: “On the other hand, yet another question arises. If it is ascertained that the weapons of mass destruction have been used by the rebels, what will the

USA do with them? What will the sponsors of the rebels do with them? Will they cut off arms shipments? Will they launch military operations against them?”

Before the summit, Putin also received the leaders of parliament, experienced diplomat Valentina Matviyenko, chairman of the Federation Council, and Speaker of the Duma Sergei Naryshkin, where Putin extended his full support to the parliamentarians’ proposal to send a delegation to Washington, to meet with their U.S. counterparts, and seek a dialogue on the threat of a wider war that would be triggered by an attack on Syria. U.S. Senate Majority leader Harry Reid rebuffed the Russians’ request.

Then, on Sept. 4, the Russian Foreign Ministry website posted a statement declaring that it had delivered a 100-page report to the UN in July, which included a detailed scientific analysis of the sample that Russian technicians had gathered at the Khan al-Asal site of an alleged chemical assault in March. That report concluded that Syrian rebels, not forces loyal to President Assad, were behind the deadly sarin gas attack in that Aleppo suburb.

At his press conference after the G20, Putin emphasized Pope Francis’s opposition to an attack on Syria, and gave a run-down on the G20 nations opposed, emphasizing the “categorical objections” by China, India, Indonesia, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, and Italy—as well as Russia.

Mercenaries for the Saudis?

The Russian leadership has consistently pointed out to the U.S. and others, that the opposition in Syria, which they are aiding, is a group of jihadi extremists, tied to al-Qaeda. On Sept. 8, Channel One, the largest nationwide TV network, featured a segment on the threatened American war against Syria, which put the matter even more starkly. The broadcast, seen by millions in Russia, said that U.S. soldiers are being turned into mercenaries for the Saudis, and that U.S. sovereignty is under the boot of the real empire, which is “the global market.” The segment led by citing U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey’s evaluation, contained in his official letters issued this Summer, that attacks on Syria could weaken the Assad government while playing into the hands of extremists such as al-Qaeda.

Like Putin himself at the G20 meeting, the show’s

anchor played up opposition from within the USA to Obama and his “red line.”

Another reporter updated the status of the attack plans. “The three days initially allowed by Obama for punishing Assad have turned into sixty,” he said, “with Saudi Arabia being called upon to pay for the cost overrun. Thus, the American servicemen, who are already less than ecstatic about fighting on the side of al-Qaeda, are going to face doing so as mercenaries for the Saudis.”